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THE SOCIALISTIC IDEAS OF AMOS.

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In a study of the Hebrew legal system, one is continually impressed by the large humanitarian and philanthropic element which appears in and stands side by side with the more formal judicial and religious laws. The brotherhood of man, the mutual responsibility of classes, and the rights of the poor, are but a few of the doctrines which here, and in the wisdom and prophetic literature, first find expression, and which finally exhibit their full development in the Gospel of the New Testament. As soon as man came in close contact with man, socialistic questions at once arose, and the biblical writers as practical teachers could not overlook them. As society became more complicated, these continually demanded more attention until, in the latter days of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, they almost overshadowed all others.

The social status in Northern Israel at this time is to be determined largely from the writings of the two prophets of the decline, Amos and Hosea; but also by the light of history it is possible to study certain forces which were active in inducing these conditions. Under the united monarchy all men were on nearly the same level, and the ruling classes associated freely with the lowest. But the simplicity of this early period had quite disappeared under the influence of new tendencies, and the life, which the prophets endeavored to preserve in the Northern kingdom by the bold act of disruption, was again threatened. With peace and alliances came a strong temptation, unknown in times of war, to imitate and adopt the life and customs of the surrounding nations. The reign of Ahab is the period in which this influence was strongest. Not only did this affect the form of the religion, but also the very nature of the political organization. The striving of the king for despotic power found its plainest expression in the injustice which appears in the story of Naboth's vineyard. Rightly is this regarded as the consum-

mation of a long series of encroachments upon the traditional, individual rights, the memory of which, after smouldering, finally like a spark kindled the revolution which overthrew the house of Ahab. But this change of feeling and aim was not confined to the rulers—it affected the commonwealth as a whole. The thirst for power and wealth was shared by those next in authority, and thus by a most natural process spread through all ranks. Under this influence also, a commercial spirit seized the nation which ever after clung to it. In this struggle for wealth the old ideas of brotherhood were being forgotten.

Later from another quarter came a different influence, but tending in the same direction. As a result of the long series of foreign wars a military class had arisen which demanded support and royal favor. Military services and wealth gradually gave rise to a noble class that repeatedly proved itself strong enough, not only to threaten, but to actually overthrow the reigning house. With this came a weakening of the authority of the central power, which ever means a defective administration of justice, under which the weaker party suffers. The growth of a nobility meant, further, a wide differentiation of classes. This was accentuated by the indirect results of the wars. As in the case of every protracted, intense struggle, such as the war with Syria, the burden of the contest falls upon the middle and lower classes. Ground down by the war tax, or unable, because of active services, to provide for themselves and families, their inheritances were consumed, and they went to swell the ranks of the abject poor. The rich in turn were able to buy their land and accept them as dependents. As the tide of battle turned and the wealth of conquest poured in, this wealth found its resting place in the royal treasury and the coffers of the nobles, but rarely did it return to the needy lower classes. Further, the principle of Lev. 25: 8–24, which enjoins the restoration of landed property every fifty years to its original owner, if in existence, was evidently a dead letter. Thus the chasm between the classes became ever wider and wider. This was greatly increased as the rich and nobles began to live in palaces in the cities. Thus removed from their dependents,

they lost that knowledge which comes only from actual contact, and which does so much to bridge over this dangerous gulf. Mutual misunderstanding and lack of sympathies did their work, until the lower classes hated the higher and the latter in turn forgot their duties and gave themselves up to the struggle for power and wealth. Mingled with this and neutralizing the influences of the true religion, which was the only hope of the times, were the corrupting practices of the false Jehovah and Baal worship. On purely *a priori*, historical grounds, therefore, the conditions which Amos and Hosea describe were to be expected. Unlike most of the men of their day, by virtue of their spiritual enlightenment they were able to interpret these facts correctly.

To understand the attitude of Amos towards the questions of his times it is necessary clearly to appreciate his standpoint. This is illustrated by his artistic introduction, chapters 1 and 2. He is broad and international in his outlook. Beginning by denouncing in turn the sins of her foes, he leads up by an irresistible logic to the condemnation of Israel herself. It is by the divine standard of right and wrong, not by the prevalent conceptions, that he measures acts. Amos' God is a God of justice. Hence He will punish cruelty and wrong wherever it be found. The Phœnicians (1: 9), for example, have been cruel and uncompassionate. Even though the victims of their hatred were their enemies, they have transgressed beyond the bounds of forgiveness. Thus in his introduction, Amos lays down those universal laws of justice and philanthropy, which his hearers concede as binding upon their enemies, and which he at once proceeds to apply to the social conditions of Northern Israel.

The specific charges of the preliminary indictment (2: 6-8) are: (1) Inhuman enslavement of the poorer classes by the richer. (2) An insatiable spirit of greed for land which led them to begrudge the very dust which the suppliants, in their grief, cast upon their heads. (3) A licentiousness in their idolatrous feasts which defied all the fundamental laws of morality. (4) A brutal lack of pity on the part of creditors which led them not only unjustly but cruelly to wrong their poor debtors. (5) The sin of the rulers, and especially the

priests, in drinking the wine which they have secured by their unjust fines.

Certain specific and prominent evils are selected as types of the whole. They are all breaches of the same general law of humanity; and what is equally significant, the sins which are cited as those of the nation are peculiarly those of the wealthy and ruling classes. The sins of the masses are not noticed, unless touched upon in the third charge. Thus, in his introduction, Amos leaves no question as to his standpoint and the object of his denunciation.

After removing the delusive belief of the people that, as the nation chosen by Jehovah, they were exempt from these universal laws, and after vindicating his prophetic calling (3: 1-8), he develops in the remainder of his book the formal terms of the arraignment. Necessarily he touches upon the religion of the land. Chapter 5: 26 contains an obscure reference to star worship, and ch. 8: 4 speaks of the sin of Samaria, which in the light of II Kings 13: 6 appears to have been the retention of the Asherah. But these two incidental allusions are all that he says about that idolatry which Hosea a few years later so bitterly attacks. Of the national religion he speaks more fully. In 5: 21-23 he refers to the uselessness of their elaborate formal worship. His terms are strong. Jehovah is represented as saying: "I hate, I despise your feasts and take no delight in your solemn assemblies." Why? Not necessarily because, in Amos' mind, they are wrong in themselves, but because in the light of the public sins they are mere hypocritical mockery. Genuine righteousness (v. 24) is what Jehovah desires. In 4: 4, 5 Amos sarcastically tells the people to persist in their empty religious practices in which they find so much pleasure. "Come to Bethel and transgress, and to Gilgal and multiply transgressions." From his standpoint the form itself of the religion is unimportant. He looks at its fruits, and since he finds them evil, he naturally infers that the former is not only useless but corrupting in its influence. In this his teaching stands in direct antithesis to that of Hosea. The chief object of attack with the latter is the religion, whether this be pure idolatry or the degenerate

Jehovah worship. The public sins are noticed only incidentally, since he sees in them merely the result of the great national apostacy. Amos, evidently from another class of society and without the deep personal experience of Hosea, regards the sins of the nation as they appear on the outside. As in his introduction, it is the infringement of the moral law which he attacks. There is nothing general or indefinite in his charges. In his opening address (2: 12), it is true, he charges the nation with rejecting the prophets and corrupting the Nazirites, but from the context it is clear that it was the evil leaders to whom he was speaking. So also in 9: 8 he proclaims the destruction of the sinful kingdom, but in the same sentence he hastens to say that not all the nation is to be condemned, but the sinners of the people, those classes which he so clearly designated. They will suffer while the others will be preserved. Amos is ever concrete. He occupies a position midway between that early conception which only regarded the nation as a unit, and the New Testament idea of the individual. He distinguished distinct classes within the nation. The objects of his attack are: (1) The rich, voluptuous women of the capital. Their cruel selfishness has made them, instead of angels of mercy, the very ones who destroy the last hope of the needy, as they incite their husbands to deeds of oppression that they may be supplied with the means of gratifying their low appetites. (2) The rich classes. All the present prosperity (8: 2-6) is to be turned into a desolation in which death shall reign supreme. Against you is this woe directed, you capitalists and merchants, who rob and oppress the poor and helpless, longing that each feast may speedily be over that you may be free to practice your deceitful trades. Deliberately you sell your poor brethren for money because they are unable to pay you their slight indebtedness. (3) The nobility and ruling classes. The hated enemies of Israel, the Phœnicians and Egyptians (3: 9, 10), are called in to witness the scenes of anarchy and oppression in Samaria, the chief city of that people who call themselves Jehovah's. Those who dwell in palaces, the leaders of the nation, have completely forgotten how to do right. Their rule is mere violence and robbery. Jehovah

is well aware of the magnitude of your transgressions (5: 12, 13), you unjust judges, who persecute an honest man, who do not hesitate to take a bribe when you are exercising judgment, who refuse to give the needy justice. A wise man suffers in silence. So completely is the power in the hands of unjust rulers that a plea for redress would but bring greater oppression. Chapter 6 is one bitter declaration of woe against the leaders of the nation. Woe unto you nobles, in your false feeling of security. Fain would you dispel all thoughts of coming retribution. Reclining upon ivory beds and luxurious couches, your senses pampered with song and music, you eat the finest dainties which the world can produce and drink the richest wines, giving yourselves over to the merely sensuous gratification of self, without a thought of the afflictions of your toiling, suffering brothers. With a supreme disregard of their duty the leaders use their power and wealth only to satisfy their own desires. Therefore upon them first shall dire punishment fall. In v. 13 he sums up the charge in a sentence, "Ye have turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood." (4) The upper classes as a whole. Upon the classes which now roll in luxury (3: 12-15), the Lord shall send a destruction so complete that only the merest remnant shall survive. All their magnificent summer and winter palaces shall be utterly consumed, since the injustice and extortion which they represent is an offence in the sight of God. An honest man (5: 10, 11) who reproves them by declaring the truth is thoroughly hated. Yes, you have crushed the poor who were helpless against your exactions, and by means of tyrannical robbery you have built expensive houses and planted pleasant vineyards. The injustice has been done, but you shall never enjoy what you have thus obtained.

It was a grim charge which Amos brought against Northern Israel, but unfortunately it was just. The surprising fact is that nowhere does he attack the sins of the lower classes. In every case, as this inductive study reveals, it is the sins of the wealthy and ruling classes which he condemns. In his teaching we have glimpses of God's love, but it was reserved for Hosea to develop this. Denunciation is the key-note of Amos' prophecy.

The essence of his teaching is before us and we are now ready to compare it with that of modern socialism. The latter takes so many different forms in different lands, and in the mind of each individual according to the type with which he has come in contact, that the exact content of the word is variously defined. In general it is the effort to improve the social condition of humanity—more especially, that of the laboring classes. All of its forms have certain characteristics in common which will be made the basis of the present comparison. To avoid indefiniteness, the type which now appears in Germany, as the most clearly defined and best known, will be taken as the standard. In justice to modern socialism, as thus exemplified, we must be careful not to make the common mistake of confounding it with the anarchistic movement. The two in ideas and methods are radically different. The one seeks lawful ends by lawful means, the other is thoroughly destructive. Now that they have formally parted company, socialism gains much by the separation. Much of the repulsion which many feel towards anything socialistic is the result of its former partial affiliation with anarchism. And further, on *a priori* principles; any ideas coming from the lower classes gain but slowly a favorable reception among the higher. To some, the mere idea that anything socialistic is found in the Bible will be at first distasteful. But let it be remembered every great movement has its good as well as evil characteristics. Certain phases of socialism are surely foreign to the spirit of the Bible, but on the other hand it contains many of those broad principles which must ever obtain because they are founded upon truth. Bearing these facts in mind, we will proceed to the comparison, noting first, points of similarity.

1. Complaint comes from the lower classes. It is the struggle of the lower classes to secure what they feel to be their rights that gives rise to the socialistic movement. It is therefore a suggestive fact in the development of the present study that Amos himself comes from the lower classes—that is, lower merely in respect of material prosperity, for in mental acumen he stands among the first men of his age. According to 1 : 1 he was a herdsman (as the original indi-

cates, one who watched sheep and goats) of the little town of Tekoa south of Bethlehem. In 7:14 he indignantly disclaims any connection with the prosperous but hypocritical class of professional prophets which then flourished in Northern Israel. He declares that he was a shepherd, one who pierced the green figs of the sycamore trees, that their ripening might be accelerated. From other sources we learn that this unpalatable fruit was only eaten by the very poorest. Amos' occupation was therefore one of the humblest.

(2) Presents the cause of the lower classes. As we have seen, it is the injustice, the oppression of the poor and needy, which Amos continually holds up as the great crime of the nation. The religious sins, the text of other prophets, he passes over to dwell upon evils to his mind more flagrant. He is at all times the champion of the lower classes. It is their wrongs which appeal to heaven for vengeance. But, unlike Hosea and Isaiah, he nowhere attacks their iniquities. From his point of view, like that of the socialist of to-day, the mass of wrong which they endure is so great that in comparison their faults were not worthy of mention.

(3) Charges directed against the ruling and wealthy classes. The stern arraignment of the nation was but a rehearsal of the iniquities of those who, having the power and wealth, have totally misused them. Violence, oppression, bribery, injustice, robbery and luxury, secured at the cost of the life blood of the dependent and laboring classes! No socialist to-day could paint the picture of his woes in stronger or more lurid colors! The times were undoubtedly in many ways darker than at present. Now, even in socialistic circles, such a sweeping denunciation would hardly receive acceptance. It is also significant that the sins of the upper classes, which are attacked, are those, and only those which react most disastrously upon the lower ranks of society—oppression, bribery, luxury which leads to extortion. Their other faults, later portrayed by Hosea, are not touched upon because foreign to his subject.

(4) Basis of the complaint—the breach of the universal law of justice and humanity. The socialist unites with Amos in demanding that the principle of the mutual right and brother-

hood of man be acknowledged and acted upon. When this is disregarded, they both call for justice. The latter may add certain unreasonable claims, but the principle from which both start is the same.

(5) Recognizes the responsibility of the upper classes. Amos does not stop with a condemnation of the outward sins of those in positions of influence, but goes much deeper and finds in wealth and power a corresponding responsibility. Why does he hold up the luxury and splendor of the upper classes to the scorn of his hearers, and declare that they are the object of Jehovah's wrath? Because he was thoroughly imbued with the idea that with the possession of these come corresponding duties which, if neglected, will call down heaven's displeasure. In 6: 8 he states this point very clearly. It is because of the selfish luxury of the upper classes that this dread destruction is coming upon the entire state. Socialism bitterly echoes this sentiment. Are they wholly wrong in throwing the responsibility and blame on the leaders in society? The words of the noted Prof. Wagner of Berlin University in a recent address are worthy of consideration. "Look at the corruption of the upper classes and you have the secret of the troubles in the social system."

(6) That the feeling of security on the part of the ruling classes is entirely without foundation. Chapter 6: 1-3, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, that feel secure, that put off the evil day." One of the chief aims of Amos' preaching was to destroy this feeling of security which so commonly prevailed among the higher ranks during the reign of Jeroboam II. That same confidence, in general, characterizes the attitude of the upper classes to-day. The socialists on the contrary, from the most intelligent to the poor laborer who feels what he is unable to think, declare that this is not warranted by the actual state of affairs.

(7) The present conditions cannot continue, a great social upheaval is the only solution. Amos studied the situation, noting the existing evils and the attitude of those in power, and with his prophetic insight declared plainly and repeatedly that destruction must and would inevitably overtake the state. It was to come from without—the Assyrians—and

was to completely overthrow the present regime; a prediction which history verified. The socialist, looking at many of the same evils and himself experiencing the wrongs of the existing system, makes the same declaration with one difference. He looks for no outside foe. According to his belief society will work out its own destruction.

(8) A glorious future for the now oppressed classes, a survival of the deserving. The picture of the present, and the immediate future as well, is dark. Amos has given up the hope of earlier prophets. He wished to set up no new king. But he looked forward to a time when the nation should be sifted and the evil elements—the object of his attack, the present ruling classes—would be eliminated, and the deserving remnant—the poor and needy, the men of his own class—should at last receive their rights and that in multiple measure. On the ruins of the present would be built up a kingdom in which the principles that he advocated would be acknowledged by all. With Amos it was the Messianic times, with modern socialism it is the indefinite future in which society will be reorganized after the great upheaval, and the laboring classes will enjoy the rights they claim.

Such, then, are the striking points of resemblance between the teachings of the plebeian prophet Amos and the tenets of modern socialism. He grapples with the same social problems. Modern socialism presents but few new features. What seems so new is really very old.

The reception of his teaching is also most suggestive. The ruling classes listen, at first perhaps with supreme indifference, later with rage and appreciation, while he lays bare their sins. The truth of his words and their general character afford no opportunity for interference, until finally in 7:9 he proclaims judgment upon the house of Jeroboam. The officials are not slow to employ this pretext to silence the socialistic agitator. For, as Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, says in his charge (7:10), "The land is not able to bear all his words." The common people will be incited by these burning statements, directed against the corrupt rulers of the land, to deeds of violence. Their effect upon the masses must have been manifest, for Amaziah hastens to send word to the

king that "Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel," and even perverts Amos' words (7: 11) that the king may be influenced to take immediate action. So threatening is the danger that Amaziah himself, apparently without waiting for the royal order, silences the prophet, and commands him to flee to Judah, and never again to dare deliver such seditious prophecy in the royal city. Like a true tribune of the people, Amos is unabashed by the show of power. He boldly completes his address with a dire threat of divine vengeance to fall upon Amaziah, who represented that class which he came to denounce. Thus was this socialist silenced by official interference while he was addressing the people on their wrongs at the hands of the upper classes. It is an interesting question whether our possession of Amos' prophecy to-day is not due to the fact that, being forbidden to speak in public, he endeavors still to promulgate his teachings by written tract, and thus set the example which was followed by later prophets. The case of Jeremiah, whose written prophecies were burnt by the king, presents a striking analogy. If this conjecture is true, the parallelism with modern socialism obtains to the very end.

These points of similarity are surely very striking, but that the comparison may be complete certain important differences, which do not appear prominently on the surface, are worthy of consideration.

(1) Difference in fundamental principles. Within the ranks of socialism itself there is a great divergence in the principles from which its advocates start in deducing their conclusions. The so-called christian socialist follows Amos, practically in every detail. The great rank and file, however, recognize no higher reasons, as the basis of their claims, than their own personal rights. In defining these rights they undoubtedly often claim more than, in justice to society as a whole, can be granted. Amos adopted the same fundamental laws of right and wrong, but found back of these a God who gave them force and content. In other words, he is thoroughly theistic, while much of socialism is materialistic or atheistic. The difference is more than a difference of terminology. It modifies his entire teaching.

The sins of the rulers was not only a sin against their brothers, but also against Jehovah. The suffering classes had no part to play in the bringing about of the great catastrophe which was to destroy the oppressor and vindicate the oppressed, because Jehovah, by virtue of his character, would accomplish this. Hence the actual conflict of classes was unknown to Amos' socialistic system. The great consummation which the socialist expects as a result of his view of the nature of the present social conditions, and which the anarchist strives to attain by force, Amos, because of his concept of divine justice, calmly awaited as inevitable.

(2) Possibilities of reform under the present system. Modern socialism has but one solution for the social problems, the complete destruction of the existing social relations. Any attempt to reform the present order is useless, and only delays the inevitable catastrophe. Amos, with his prophetic insight, realized that, in view of the deadly internal decay of the nation, destruction was certain. At the same time he did not make the mistake of to-day, and say that there was no possible remedy. There was one way of escape. O men of Israel, (5 : 4) seek ye me and ye shall live. Again in 5 : 6 he repeats the same thought. A thorough inward reform is the hope. Seek good (5 : 14) and not evil, that ye may live. This plain conditional element runs through his entire prophecy. Any one who works righteousness shall be saved. His principles admit of a faithful remnant among the rich as well as the poor. In this he shows the wisdom of his conclusions. All classes would do well to consider his teaching, for the light which it throws upon present conditions. There is a real danger against which there is but one safeguard. That is a seeking of God and the principles which He represents. A thorough reform in all classes which will bear fruit in attitude and actions. When this is realized, socialism, as representing the claims of one class in society, would speedily die a natural death, since the cause of its existence would be removed.

(3) Individual responsibility. Socialism fixes its gaze on classes and overlooks the individual. Amos had not reached the New Testament position, but he was looking that way.

When classe proved unfaithful, he found hope in the remnant, which in reality was the individual. In him, fully awake to his duties, he found the hope of deliverance.

(4) The future not to be that complete overturning of society, for which socialism longs, but a thorough reform. Like the socialist, Amos presented no definite plan of reorganization. His vision did not extend far beyond the great time of sifting when the evil elements of the nation were to be entirely eliminated. According to his teaching, this means the almost total annihilation of the upper classes. But in his picture of the restored Zion there is no indication of the abolition of the present social organization. Amos' one aim is thorough reform. In this he is the forerunner of the reforms which were realized under Hezekian and Josiah, and the advocate of those divinely inspired principles which, if heeded, would have solved the threatening questions of his times, and which alone meet the same socialistic problems to-day. In view of the social conditions under which he labored, and in fidelity to his fundamental principles, Amos could be nothing other than a socialist, but, by virtue of his God-enlightened intellegence, he was able to avoid errors, to appreciate things at their true value, and to take that position which makes his teachings ever worthy of the designation—practical.